



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Forbidden Pleasures

Citation for published version:

Fuller, M 2016, 'Forbidden Pleasures' The Wagner Journal, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 76-77.

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

The Wagner Journal

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Forbidden Pleasures

Michael Fuller enjoys the first French production of 'Das Liebesverbot'

Das Liebesverbot. Robert Bork (Friedrich), Benjamin Hulett (Luzio), Thomas Blondelle (Claudio), Marion Ammann (Isabella), Agnieszka Slawińska (Mariana), Wolfgang Bankl (Brighella), Peter Kirk (Antonio), Jaroslaw Kitala (Angelo), Norman Patzke (Danieli), Hanne Roos (Dorella), Andreas Jaeggi (Pontio Pilato), Chœurs de l'Opéra National du Rhin, Orchestre Philharmonique de Strasbourg/Constantin Trinks; Mariame Clément (director), Julia Hansen (set and costume designer), Marion Hewlett (lighting designer), Mathieu Guilhaumon (choreography). La Filature, Mulhouse, 3 June 2016

'The reader is hardly likely ever to see a performance of *Die Feen*, *Das Liebesverbot* or *Rienzi*', wrote Ernest Newman in 1949. How times are changing. The last four years have seen performances of *Das Liebesverbot* in Frankfurt, Leipzig and London (the first available on CD, the others reviewed in *The Wagner Journal*, viii/2 and x/1 respectively): now, hot on the heels of Kasper Holten's recent production in Madrid, comes this French première of Wagner's *grosse komische Oper*, from Opéra National du Rhin. Wagner may later have dismissed this work as 'atrocious, abominable, nauseating', but after 180 years of neglect audiences are now being given the opportunity to make up their own minds.

Wagner relocated his adaptation of *Measure for Measure* from Vienna to Sicily, in order to contrast his perception of the joyful, hedonistic atmosphere of the South with the repressive mores of northern Europe (symbolised in the opera by Friedrich, the German governor of Palermo). Mariame Clément's well-wrought production reverses this, moving the action to a postwar north European café-bar. A lengthy dumb-show precedes and accompanies the overture, during the course of which we see a broad cross-section of the community using the café. Three waitresses file across the stage, hands folded as if in a religious procession, to signal that they are replacing the nuns of the original (presumably, the link is that both are devoted to lives of service). At the conclusion of the overture the lederhosen-clad Brighella, and five similarly-attired henchmen, burst in, close the bar, put up notices of activities now forbidden to the populace, and segregate the men and women.

The same set, with tables rearranged or removed to indicate scene changes, is used throughout, serving as Wagner's convent, courtroom, prison and carnival setting. There are some inventive humorous touches: the imprisoned Dorella, Pilato and Claudio appear constrained in the café's cold cabinets (presumably to chill their ardour), and the final carnival scene sees the chorus appearing as characters from Wagner's later works – Wotan, Siegfried, Fafner-als-Wurm, Sachs, Amfortas, numerous Valkyries, Flowermaidens and so on.

The role of Isabella requires a near-impossible combination of vocal power and agility. Marion Ammann, who has Elsa, Sieglinde and Isolde in her repertoire, brought an authentic Wagnerian heft to the part, although this was at the expense of some smudging of Isabella's coloratura passages (for example, at 'Ha, welche Lust' in the Act I finale). Robert Bork commanded the stage physically and vocally in his appearances as Friedrich, cutting quite a dash as Zorro in his carnival costume. Benjamin Hulett was a puppyish Luzio with an appealing light tenor, though he appeared taxed by Wagner's



Hanne Roos as Dorella, imprisoned in a cold cabinet, in Mariame Clément's *Das Liebesverbot*. Photo Klara Beck

tessitura at times. Thomas Blondelle did what he could with the ambiguous character of Claudio. Agnieszka Sławińska fielded an attractive soprano as Mariana, blending beautifully with Ammann in their duet 'Göttlicher Frieden'. Wolfgang Bankl was a strong, forthright Brighella, and Hanne Roos sang brightly as a feisty Dorella. The Chœurs de l'Opéra National du Rhin sang with commendable precision, and the experienced Wagnerian Constantin Trinks produced an account of the score which brought out well its light and shade, demonstrating it to be rather more than a straightforward retread of the *bel canto* models which lie behind it.

To be sure, *Das Liebesverbot* hardly foretells the mighty works which were to follow it (aside from a few bars in Act I which recur in *Tannhäuser*). It is dramatically rather pedestrian, and it has its longueurs; but it also contains some delightful music. Clément and her team here showed it to be worthy of the attention it is currently receiving, and ill-deserving of the opprobrium which has been heaped upon it in the past.